



extending your home

home extensions design guide

draft

september 2004

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foreword

'Welcome to Birmingham City Council's guide to help you achieve a well-designed extension to your home. We have written the guide to tell you about our policies on good design and explain what we are looking for when we assess planning applications for home extensions.

We are committed to improving the quality of the built environment and promoting good design. It is essential that we retain the character of Birmingham's many attractive and desirable neighbourhoods and work to raise the quality of the city's more run-down areas. For these reasons, we expect all new development to be well-designed and in an appropriate place. We look carefully for this when we receive planning applications.

Good design is also very important for you as a homeowner. It is worth remembering that a poorly designed extension may not only spoil the appearance of your home but could even reduce its value. Using this guide may help you avoid making costly mistakes.

Finally, please remember that in most cases you will need permission to extend your home. Please check the section at the back of this guide to find out about the permissions you may need.

We wish you every success with your project.'

**Councillor Ken Hardeman,
Cabinet Member for
Regeneration**

**Councillor David Roy,
Chair of the Development
Control Committee**

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The impact of any extension should respect the appearance of the streetscene.

Section

1

who is this guide for?

This guide is for homeowners planning to extend their home. It explains the design issues you need to consider. The aim is to help you avoid mistakes and ensure your proposals meet the Council's standards for planning permission.

A poorly designed extension can spoil the outside appearance of your home and reduce its value.

Section

2

why good design should matter to you

Extending your home is an important decision and is often a big expense, so it is important to consider carefully the size and type of extension that best suits your needs. Will an extension at the back or side of the house be best? Perhaps a loft conversion building over the garage is a better option for you? At worst, a poorly designed extension can spoil the outside appearance of your home and reduce its value, impact on your next door neighbour and spoil the appearance of the street. In some cases it may be wise to move house rather than build a large, costly extension in an unsuitable location.

IMPORTANT ADVICE

- Please remember that you must check with us whether you need planning permission and/or building regulations approval for your extension.
- There may also be other issues that you will need to consider - for example whether you live in a conservation area or any of your trees are protected by a preservation order.
- Please check sections 8 and 9 of this guide to help you find out whether any of these issues apply to you.

section 3



A carefully considered extension that responds appropriately to the appearance of the street and avoids the terracing effect.



Consider the style and appearance of your street.



A well designed extension with a roof that reflects the original building.



An inappropriate sized front extension.

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Section

3

what are the main principles for a well-designed extension?

There are three main principles to good design of a home extension:

PRINCIPLE ONE:

■ Respect the appearance of the local area and your home.

PRINCIPLE TWO:

■ Ensure the extension does not adversely affect your neighbours.

PRINCIPLE THREE:

■ Minimise the impact on the environment.

These are explained in detail in the next three sections of this guide.

Please be sure to consider all three principles carefully before drawing up plans and submitting a planning application. Not all the principles will be relevant to all extensions. Even if you do not need permission, you will get the best results with your project by following this guide.

Front extensions usually need the most careful consideration, because they can be seen from public areas. However, side extensions and in some cases extensions at the back can be seen just as easily. Whatever the

position of your proposed extension, please be sure to think about how it will affect the appearance of the street, whether it will be in keeping with the original house and the affect on your neighbours.

Please contact us if you need any further information and design advice - we are here to help. Please see the back of this guide for contact details.

MEETING YOUR NEEDS

Birmingham is a multi-cultural, diverse city and we appreciate that people's needs when extending their home may vary greatly. If you have any special requirements for the design of your extension, please talk to us. Our Planning Officers can work with you to find design solutions that are in line with our policies and also meet your requirements.

Consider all three principles carefully before drawing up plans.



Front extensions must not dominate and detract from the appearance of the street. This is an unsuccessful example.

A well designed porch.

A poorly designed dominant porch.

Section

4

principle one: respect the appearance of the local area

The Council's aim is to improve the quality of the built environment. We do not seek to standardise the design of extensions nor are we against innovative designs. What we are looking for is a high standard of design which complements the scale and style of your house and others nearby. Contemporary designs that complement the character and culture of the local area can be perfectly acceptable. But we will not allow poor designs that spoil the appearance of the property or the street scene.

Overall, your aim should be to make the extension look as if it were part of the original house, unless there are very good architectural reasons for doing otherwise. Please consider:

- The style, character and appearance of your home. Your extension should be in keeping with this, using similar shapes, sizes and designs for windows, doors and other features.
- The size of your extension compared to the size of your house. Extensions should be smaller than the main part of the house and not dominate it's appearance.

- The character of the area. Extensions should fit in comfortably with the character of the area. It is worth taking a look at other well-designed house extensions in your area to get an idea of designs that work best.
- The affect of your extension on the appearance of the street and neighbouring homes. Your extension should be in scale with the width and height of existing buildings, including floor to ceiling heights. It should be consistent with the building line of other homes in the street.

EXTENSIONS TO THE FRONT OF YOUR HOME

An extension at the front may not be acceptable unless the proposal will clearly improve the appearance of your house. This is because a front extension can dominate the view for passers-by, step out of line from the existing line of frontages and spoil the character of the house or area.

PORCHES

The most acceptable type of front extension is a porch. The design should be modest in scale and reflect the style and materials of your house. It should be in keeping with the appearance of the street.



An inappropriate side extension.



Sensibly scaled side extension.



The inappropriate effect of terracing.



Setting the first floor back over the garage will help avoid a significant impact upon the streetscape.

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EXTENSIONS TO THE SIDE OF YOUR HOME

Two storey extensions, including bedrooms over garages, can have a significant effect on the street scene. The loss of the gap between detached or semi-detached homes can create the impression of a continuous frontage. This is called the ‘terracing effect’. It can be out of character with the appearance of the area and is best avoided. For example, on the first floor, you may need to reduce the size of the extension to leave a visible gap between the houses or set it back from the front wall of the original house.

Generally, a side extension should be designed to look less important than the existing building so that it does not dominate the appearance of the whole house. Only occasionally will a side extension larger than the main house be acceptable.

EXTENSIONS AT THE BACK OF YOU HOME

Extensions at the back do not usually affect the appearance of the street. However, you should consider how it will look from neighbouring properties. You also need to consider whether it will affect your neighbours’ privacy, the view from their house or reduce their daylight. You must apply the Council’s 45 degree code to the design of your extension (see section 5 of this guide).

All extensions at the back must be designed to look less important than the existing building so that it does not dominate the appearance of the whole house.

Do this...



...do not do this.



Two storey rear extensions can seriously affect the outlook and light to adjoining properties.



CORNER EXTENSIONS

If your house is on a street corner and you wish to extend on the corner side, you must take extra care to ensure the extension looks attractive from the street. Please avoid blank gable ends and large areas of blank walls. We may refuse permission for garages on corners for this reason.

It may not be acceptable to build over the whole area of a corner plot because it is likely to be very noticeable and spoil the appearance of the street. You need to consider the effect on existing building lines and neighbouring buildings, the character of the area, existing trees and landscaping, and whether it will overlook neighbouring back gardens.



A poorly designed corner is particularly noticeable and detracts from the appearance of the street.

ROOFS

The roof of your extension should fit in with the type and style of roofs in the area. Please use the same or similar materials and make sure the slope matches that on your existing house and neighbouring homes. Flat roofs are often not suitable, but may occasionally be appropriate.

DORMER WINDOWS

If you are considering a dormer window, it must not be so big that it dominates the roof. Take care that it is in keeping with your house generally, with the roof and in particular with the style of the windows used on the lower floors. Choose simple windows and try to match the style of any other original dormer windows in the neighbourhood.



The pitch of any new roof should match those on the existing property in style and form.

The Council's aim is to improve the quality of the built environment.



Flat roofed dormers will only be appropriate if they reflect the character of the property.



The design should reinforce and evolve local characteristics that are considered positive such as window type, chimneys, architectural decoration and proportion.

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SLOPING ROOF LIGHTS

Sloping roof lights are sometimes a good alternative to dormer windows. They are less noticeable and are less likely to affect your neighbours' privacy. You do not usually need planning permission for sloping roof lights. However, you still need to think about whether roof lights will be in keeping with the street scene and in some cases they will not be acceptable at the front of the house.



A roof extension out of proportion with the property.

Dormers should normally be built in proportion to the overall roof size to reflect the character of the house.

ROOF SPACE (LOFT) CONVERSIONS

Adding extra rooms in your roof space can be a good way of making your home bigger and can increase its value. In most cases you do not need planning permission for this, but you will need building regulations approval. However, it may not be acceptable to add a dormer window or roof light if it will spoil the appearance of the street.

Where a dormer is built to the front elevation it should be designed to reflect the architectural character of the house and should be built in proportion to the overall size of the roof.





A side extension before...



A porch before...



Frontage before...



...and after improvement.



...and after improvement.



...and after improvement.

DESIGN DETAILS

- **Decorative features.** Please keep all original decorative features or renew them where they are damaged. It can also work well if you echo original decorative features in the design of your new extension
- **Chimneys.** Please keep chimneystacks wherever possible - they help improve the street scene and skyline.
- **Bay windows.** New bay windows should have the same general shape and appearance as original bays on your own and neighbouring homes.
- **Windows and doors.** New windows and doors should match those on the original house, with the same size and shape openings. If this is not possible, they should at least be in proportion with other similar windows in the neighbourhood.
- **Materials.** In most cases, we expect the materials used to match the existing building. Please take care to match colours and textures. This includes windows, doors,

brickwork, roofing and architectural details. Where possible, use reclaimed materials. Not only is this more environmentally friendly (see section 6 of this guide), but you will also be more likely to get the best possible match of colour and texture. In some cases, we will ask to see and approve samples of materials before construction begins. Using inappropriate materials can sometimes be an expensive mistake, so do ask us for advice if you are unsure.

GARAGES AND PARKING

Garages and parking areas should be in proportion to the size of the house. They should not stand out as prominent features as this can spoil the appearance of your home and the character of the area. You should ensure that garage doors would not dominate the front view of your house. Please do not cover over your front garden to provide extra car parking space. It is far better to incorporate limited parking space into a well-designed

frontage, which includes some planting to soften the effect. This will enhance the appearance of the frontage and may add value to your home.

A new dropped kerb from the highway would need approval.

Materials that match the existing property should be used.

Responding to the appearance of the property and the street can ensure the unique identity of a place is not harmed. Here we show a good example before and after.



Garage after improvement.



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Section

5 principle two: ensure the extension does not adversely affect your neighbours

The impact of your extension proposal on neighbouring homes is another important consideration. Your proposal should not spoil your neighbours' enjoyment of their home through loss of daylight, loss of the outlook from their home or loss of privacy. To help prevent this happening and to protect your neighbours, you must apply the 45 degree code to your extension design.

THE 45 DEGREE CODE

Extensions at the back of your home must comply with the Council's '45 degree code'. The code is designed to protect a neighbour's enjoyment of their property. Briefly, it means that there must be an angle of at least 45 degrees between

specified points on your extension and your neighbour's windows. An extension should not project beyond the projected lines.

Please ask us for a copy of the '45 Degree Code Guide' which explains how to apply the policy.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT SITUATIONS TO AVOID?

When designing your extension, the main situations to avoid are:

- Significantly reducing the size of your garden space or land around your home.
- Windows facing the side boundary, particularly where the windows will overlook neighbouring homes and gardens.

- Extending beyond the front building line of neighbouring homes.

DETAILED ISSUES

- **The Party Wall Act.** If you are proposing to extend on or near the boundary, you must comply with the Party Wall Act. The purpose of this law is to ensure good neighbourliness when proposing an extension that may affect a boundary shared with your neighbour. Please ask us for a leaflet that explains what you must consider and what you may need to do.
- **Crossing the boundary.** No part of the of your extension should cross the boundary - this includes foundations and gutters. If this is unavoidable,

by law* you must tell your neighbour and subsequently get their permission. There is a special form for this purpose - please ask us for a copy.

*Section 65 of the Town and Country Planning Act.

- **Conservatories.** If you want to build a conservatory up to the boundary, we may expect you to use obscure glazing in side windows in some cases (for example where there is no screening, such as a high fence). This is to protect your neighbour's privacy and your own.
- **Space between homes.** Where houses are close together, there must be adequate space left between them to maintain privacy (please see section 7 of this guide). You will also need to refer to our separate guide called 'Places for Living' for more detailed information.
- **Trees.** Protected trees must not be damaged or removed as a result of your extension. For more information about this, please see section 9 of this guide.



Contemporary design that improves the appearance of the property will be welcomed.

Section

6 principle three: minimise the impact on the environment

A well-designed extension must not only look good and enhance the street scene, it must also have a minimum impact on the environment. This means that it must have high standards of thermal and noise insulation, including the type of glazing used. Ideally, it could be built using environmentally-friendly materials, reclaimed materials and materials that are available locally. This approach is known as 'sustainability'.

DETAILED ISSUES

■ **Ground conditions.** Existing ground conditions should be fully assessed before any work starts on site. This is to check for the water table level, soil type and whether there are any buried contaminants or

archaeological remains. The extension can then be designed to take account of any problems found.

■ **Materials.** Use materials that are durable, recyclable and environmentally friendly where possible.

■ **Heat and sound insulation.** Your extension must be built to the standard of heat and sound insulation required by building regulations (part L). This standard applies even to replacement windows (see below).

■ **Replacement windows.** If you are replacing any windows as part of your extension work, building regulations state that they must be replaced with FENSA approved frame and glass.

■ **Orientation of the extension.**

It can be worthwhile to design your extension to take account of the direction it faces. For example, if it faces south, using larger windows will let in the sun during the winter months and help reduce your heating bills (although you may need to consider blinds or other ways to control the heat in the summer). You should only do this provided larger windows will not conflict with other design issues in this guide, particularly your neighbours' right to privacy.

■ **Roof space (loft) conversions.** Generally these are much more cost-effective and energy efficient than an extension. Using the roof

space also means you do not lose any garden space or obstruct daylight. We recommend that you do not use standard trussed rafters in a new roof, because these prevent use of the roof space in the future.

■ **Conservatories** can provide a useful addition to your house, but you must ensure that there is a fully insulated wall between the conservatory and the house. This should include airtight windows and doors.

Use materials that are durable, recyclable and environmentally friendly where possible.

space between buildings and accommodation sizes

It is important to leave an appropriate gap or space between your extension and neighbouring buildings especially along boundaries. This is to protect your neighbours' enjoyment of their home, and the enjoyment of you and future residents of your home. Ensuring that the internal accommodation is designed to be large enough for comfortable use is also important.

Usually adequate spacing and size can be achieved through careful design. But in some cases where this is not possible or appropriate, we reserve the right to apply the Council's minimum standards. These are set out in the paragraphs below.

Even where concerns about spacing and sizes can be dealt with through design, these standards provide a useful guide. For example, leaving 21 metres between the backs of houses facing one another ensures a reasonable garden length and some degree of privacy without high screening. Similarly, using a 1.8 metre high fence or other screening will generally ensure that neighbouring gardens are not overlooked from ground level.

Please remember that it is not enough simply to apply these standards. Your extension will only be acceptable if the design is consistent with the main principles in this guide.

Adequate spacing and size can be achieved through careful design.

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Design point:

Space between buildings facing one another at the front or back.

Minimum standard:

- 21 metres for a two-storey extension.
- 27.5 metres for three storeys and above, or where the main living room or kitchen window is above ground level and will overlook neighbouring homes.
- The distance should be increased by 2 metres for every 1 metre rise in ground level between the extension and existing homes.
- We will apply these standards more strictly to extensions at the back of the house rather than the front.
- Single storey extensions, where privacy is less of an issue, are judged on their merits.

Design point:

Main windows overlooking existing private space.

Minimum standard:

Set back 5 metres for each storey. This applies independently to the spacing standards above.

Design point:

Elevations (external walls) with windows.

Minimum standard:

- 12.5 metres between windowed elevations and one and two storey flank walls opposite
- 15.5 metres for three storey flank walls.
- Where a flank wall will be higher than a windowed elevation, increase the space between them by 1 metre for every 1 metre change in the ground level.

Design point:

Screening the extension for privacy.

Minimum standard:

Screen walls or fences on the boundary must be at least 1.8 metres high unless adequate mature hedges, trees or fencing already exists.

Design point:

Bedroom sizes.

Minimum standard:

These areas may include fitted wardrobes but should exclude airing cupboards and bulkheads:

- 12.6 square metres (135 square feet) minimum for the first double bedroom;
- 10.26 square metres (110 square feet) minimum for the second double bedroom;
- 6.56 square metres (70 square feet) minimum for single bedrooms.

Design point:

Garden sizes.

Minimum standard:

- 70 square metres minimum for a family home.
- 52 square metres for 2 bed houses (permitted development rights may be removed). See Section 8.
- 30 square metres for each unit for flats and other developments with communal grounds.

getting permission

If you decide to extend your home we recommend that you contact us early on to discuss your proposals. We have a team of Planning Officers dedicated to dealing with domestic extensions who can advise you about the permissions you may need, the application fees and design issues.

Some small extensions may not need planning permission. This is because most but not all homes have some form of 'permitted development rights'. You need to check with us to find out what permitted development rights you may have on your home. In some cases these rights have been removed.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

To get the best result we recommend that you employ an architect or qualified designer to draw up plans for your extension. This person should be able to design an extension that will best meet your needs and fit comfortably in with the character of the local area. They may also be able to act as your agent and submit any necessary applications, such as for planning permission and building regulations approval, on your behalf.

There are two important first steps to getting permission:

1. **Check** with us whether you need planning permission or building regulations approval.
2. **Discuss** your proposals with your neighbours. If you submit a planning application we will consult them, but it can help avoid conflict if you talk to them at an earlier stage.

It is important to note that you are in a better protected position if you obtain planning approval before any construction work starts. Failure to do this can cause enforcement action to be triggered.

We recommend that you contact us early on to discuss your proposals.

PLANNING PERMISSION

If you do need planning permission, you will need to complete and submit a Householder Planning Application form.

BUILDING REGULATIONS APPROVAL

It is likely that you will need building regulations approval, even if you do not need planning permission. Please check with us early on. Building regulations are the national minimum building standards that provide acceptable levels of health and safety for people who occupy or visit buildings. The regulations are also concerned with energy conservation and making buildings more accessible for disabled people. Most building work must be checked to ensure it complies with the regulations.

The City Council runs a scheme to help avoid problems with 'cowboy' builders. Contact Building Control for more information.

OTHER PERMISSIONS

You may also need other types of permission, depending on where you live. For example if you live in a listed building you may need listed building consent. Please see section 9 of this guide, 'Other issues you may need to consider'. You should check with us early on whether there are other permissions you may need.

WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE:

- Application forms for planning permission and building regulations approval are available on our website www.birmingham.gov.uk/planning. Alternatively we can post forms to you or you can collect them from our offices.
- You will also find on our website full information on how to apply for planning permission and building regulations approval and details of fees.
- We also have available a number of leaflets that may help you, including leaflets explaining how to make a planning application and the difference between planning permission and building regulations approval.

9 other issues you may need to consider

IF YOUR HOME IS IN THE GREEN BELT:

Most types of development in the green belt are not allowed. However extensions to existing homes may be acceptable if they are in scale with the existing building. You also need planning permission to extend your garden onto agricultural land in the green belt, because it involves a change of use.

IF YOUR HOME IS A LISTED BUILDING:

If your home is listed, you will need to make a separate application for listed building consent before you can extend it. Your extension must not adversely affect the character of the existing building and historical features must not be removed. The design of the extension and the materials used should be in keeping with the original building

LOCALLY LISTED BUILDINGS:

The Council keeps a 'local list' of buildings of local historic importance and we can tell you if your home is on the local list. These do not have legal protection and listed building consent is not needed, but you may need planning permission. The design of any extensions should be in keeping with the existing building.

IF YOUR HOME IS IN A CONSERVATION AREA:

Before carrying out any demolition work (for example knocking down an existing garage as part of your extension plans) you may need conservation area consent. Please check with us. All trees in conservation areas are protected - please see 'If your extension may affect protected trees' below.

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IF YOUR EXTENSION IS FOR SOMEONE WITH A DISABILITY:

We are always willing to help you find acceptable solutions to design problems and as with any extension proposal, it is best to consult us at an early stage. Wherever possible, we will support proposals that are for the sole benefit of someone with a disability. However, it is still important to apply the design principles in this guide, in particular to ensure that neighbours are not adversely affected by your proposals. We will be more flexible about design in some cases.

IF YOUR HOME IS IN AN AREA THAT MAY BE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE:

If your extension might disturb archaeological remains, you may need to have an archaeological evaluation carried out. You will need to submit with your planning application a report from a qualified archaeologist which explains how the remains might be affected and what action you will take to preserve them. Please contact us for advice if you think this may apply to you.

IF YOUR EXTENSION MAY AFFECT PROTECTED TREES:

Some trees on private land, including private gardens, are protected by tree preservation orders. All trees in conservation areas are protected. Your extension must be designed so that protected trees are not removed or damaged. You must ask us for permission before carrying out any work to a protected tree, including tree surgery.

EXTENDING YOUR GARDEN:

You will need planning permission to extend your garden onto publicly used land, such as highway verges, because it involves a change of use. You also need planning permission to put up a fence more than 1 metre high to enclose the land if it is next to a road.

Generally the Council has no objections to garden extensions which involve using small areas of open land on housing estates, but you will need to get approval from the landowner. We are less likely to give approval if you want to extend onto playing fields or a path.

Listed Buildings: The design of the extension and the materials used should be in keeping with the original building.

Section 10

notes for architects, agents and other professionals

Extending Your Home and planning policy

- 'Extending Your Home' has the status of Supplementary Planning Document.
- It builds on our policy of improving the built environment, as set out in the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (see Deposit Draft, paragraphs 3.8 and 3.10) and design guidance in 'Places for Living'.
- The Birmingham Plan is available at local libraries, on the internet at www.birmingham.gov.uk/udp and at our offices.

OTHER USEFUL READING

- Birmingham City Council.
The 45° Code Guidelines for Household Extensions.
Birmingham City Council.
- Birmingham City Council.
Places for Living.
Guidance for new residential development (2001).
Birmingham City Council.
- Birmingham City Council.
Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings.
A guide for owners and occupiers.
Birmingham City Council.
- Birmingham City Council.
Adapting your Home for Someone with a Disability.
Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham City Council.
Green Belt Development Control Policy.
Birmingham City Council.

DoE (1997).
PPG1 - General Policies and Principles.
HMSO.

DoE (1994).
PPG15 - Planning and the Historic Environment
HMSO.

Birmingham City Council.
Building Regulations - Homeowner Handbook.
Birmingham City Council.

DTLR Planning.
A Guide for Householders.
DTLR Planning.

Birmingham City Council.
Planning Permission and Building Regulations Approval - A Guide for Householders and Small Businesses.
Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham City Council.
A Householders Guide to Making a Planning Application.
Birmingham City Council.

Section 11

how to contact us

For a copy of this guide in large print, another language or other alternative format, please contact us. We aim to supply within 10 working days.

Telephone:
(0121) 303 1115

Minicom:
(0121) 303 3992

PLANNING ENQUIRIES:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/planning

Planning Control
Householder Team
Birmingham City Council
PO Box 28 Alpha Tower
Suffolk Street Queensway
Birmingham
B1 1TU

Telephone Planning Direct on:
(0121) 303 1115

E-mail: planning.enquiries@birmingham.gov.uk

Fax: (0121) 303 4838

Minicom: (0121) 303 3992

BUILDING REGULATIONS ENQUIRIES:

www.birmingham.gov.uk/buildingconsultancy

Building Consultancy
Birmingham City Council
1 Lancaster Circus
Birmingham
B4 7DY

Telephone: (0121) 303 2911 or
(0121) 303 3086

E-mail: building.consultancy@birmingham.gov.uk

Fax: (0121) 303 4841

Minicom: (0121) 464 0938



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